

BUSINESS OF BLOGGING

Case Study of Profitable Fashion Blogging and Revenue Models

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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Toiminnallisen opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli esitellä ja analysoida mahdollisuuksia blogin kehittymisestä tuottavaksi liiketoimintakonseptiksi sen pitäjälle. Erityisesti opinnäytetyö valottaa erilaisia ansaintalogiikoita rajatun muotiblogin käytössä. Projektina ja tutkimuksen kohteena toimi Coco the Choco-muotiblogi, joka keskittyy erityisesti Japanilaiseen katumuotiin, esittelemällä erilaisia tuotteita ja palveluja pienelle, mutta erityisen sitoutuneelle kohderyhmälle.</p> <p>Sosiaalisen median suosio on lisännyt ihmisten viettämää aikaa Internetissä, sekä muokannut yleistä sosiaaliikäyttäytymistä, luoden uuden kommunikaatiovälineen yritysten ja kohderyhmien välillä. Tämä on johtanut uusien markkinointistrategioiden ja -mallien muodostumiseen, kattaen laajasti eteenkin sosiaalisen median sen eri muotoineen. Erilaisten ilmiöiden ympärille on syntynyt sosiaalisia ryhmittymiä ja yhteenkuuluvuuden tarve on luonut valmiita kohderyhmiä yritysten hyödynnettäväksi. Blogien käyttäminen markkinointikeinona antaa yrityksille suoran kanavan tavoittaa haluttu kohderyhmä nopeasti ja tarkasti.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyö kertoo blogin pitäjän arjesta, valottaa eri ansaintalogiikoita ja niiden toimivuutta blogiympäristössä sekä esittelee kommunikaation toiminnallisuutta blogin pitäjän ja yritysten välillä. Lisäksi avataan erilaisten hyödykkeiden tuomia arvoja niin kohderyhmälle kuin blogin pitäjälle.</p> <p>Blogin tavoitteiden asettaminen sekä niiden saavuttaminen, sekä ansaintalogiikat ovat selvennetty opinnäytetyön lopussa. Blogit ovat saavuttaneet suosionsa nopeasti, joten jatkuva nousujohteisuus hidastuu tulevaisuudessa. Ne ovat kuitenkin tulleet jäädäkseen, joten blogien hyödyntäminen tulisi lisätä osaksi yritysten menestyskestävä markkinointistrategiaa.</p>		
Avainsanat (asiasanat) Sosiaalinen media, blogi, bloggaaminen, markkinointi,		



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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The purpose of the case study was to research and analyze the possibilities of a blog turning profitable to the blogger. The thesis aims to enlighten the revenue models to use for a specific fashion genre blog. The case study was conducted through Coco the Choco-blog, which focuses on Japanese street fashion; forming a specific target group and followers.</p> <p>The evolution of social media has created an increase of the public's Internet usage and behavior. New marketing channels have developed as well as new marketing strategies. People announce their interests on social media openly, thus forming an existing target group for the businesses to find. Using blogs for marketing purposes provides the companies a direct channel to the desired target groups.</p> <p>The thesis aims to provide a view from the blogger's perspective; the usage of the revenue models, communication flow with the companies, and the commodities received.</p> <p>The conclusion clarifies the objects achieved, the benefits and opportunities of the revenue models. The blogs have developed with a rapid pace; therefore the continuous increasing is most likely to slow down. However, the blogs are here to stay, thus to be included to profitable marketing strategy.</p>		
Keywords Social media, blogs, blogging, marketing,		

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1 INTRODUCTION

"We are now in the era of social marketing" (Reed 2012). Social media and the revolution of blogs have changed how people behave on the Internet. As Reed (2012) states that one of the basic human instincts is to connect with people and socialize, the blogging platforms, such as Blogger, have grown increasingly popular in a short period of time. Social media is answering to the people's needs to share and feel special. However, according to Reed (2012), the evolution of social media has isolated the public from real face-to-face interaction, thus creating the feeling of loneliness now more prominent on everyday life. Spending an increasing amount of time on various different social media channels has created new job descriptions and positions for the enthusiastic users with expertise in different fields of business.

The thesis aims to highlight the possibilities of benefiting from small-scale blogging with a specific genre, without large financial investment. The goals and the desired number of partners to be achieved and the results and communication flow are stated on this study. The thesis also aims to provide an insight what blogs are, how have been developed and also give a perspective of what the benefits are for a company to use an already existing blog as a channel for marketing.

During the implementation of the case various revenue models were analyzed and practiced to collect data. The revenue models chosen were only a few examples of all the possible ones. However the revenue models chosen were considered the best regarding the content and the nature of the blog. The companies who suggested co-operation implied the revenue models. Some revenue models such as donations and consulting services were ruled out for being irrelevant to the blog (Müller, Goswami & Krcmar, 2010). The usage of the donation revenue model can be seen as an arrogant way of making profit from blogging, therefore discarded from the possibilities.

The blog's layout needed to be designed to fit to the theme and content of the blog, and as I possessed no technical coding skills; a third party created the CSS code used on the layout according to my design free of charge. Google's

Blogger was chosen as the platform for the blog, for the reason that it was easy to use and register with an existing Gmail account. As a part of the Google network it provided existing multiple widgets to be installed on the blog's sidebar without the need of coding. Publishing posts with text and pictures is simple, however for users with more technical skills Blogger offers also a HTML-coding option for publishing posts.

2 BLOGGING REVOLUTION

According to Holtz & Demopoulos (2006), "May 2, 2005, will be remembered as the landmark day in the history of business blogging". On that day the Business Week's staff members Stephen Baker and Heather Green published their "Blogging will change your business" –article, and it made every CEO and executive aware of the potential of blogging. Before the article the executives had an unclear idea what blogs were about and were unable to see their potential or threats (Holtz & Demopoulos 2006). Prior to blogs, the mass media and printing press had the power to decide what the public was informed about. Personal websites such as blogs made publishing information free in contrast to mass media publications – thus they turned the publishing world upside down (Baker & Green 2008).

However, writing a personal blog at the time was possible for people with some level of technical skills. Information regarding the blogs had been published before the Baker & Green's article. Consequently, these publications were commonly small and read by the technically skilled people (Holtz & Demopoulos 2006).

According to Baker & Green (2008), the mass media was changing drastically for the reason that the gap between journalists and the public was fading, thus changing the entire basis of the publishing business. The companies, which were accustomed to having an effect on their message, were unable to keep a hold of it any longer, therefore the change of strategy and approach needed reconsidering. It was necessary to learn what the blogs were and what kind of impact they would cause on their business.

2.1. Development of the Internet

Blogging would not be possible without the development of the Internet to a consumer product. According to Charlesworth (2009, p. 2 – 3), the World Wide Web was first developed to serve the military purposes. As a small

communication system between a few computer units, the Web was slowly developed for a few decades. Tim Berners-Lee established the basic rules of the World Wide Web in 1980. Comparing to the development from earlier, the Internet took a huge leap forward in the 1980s. The development of the basics of the Internet known today, such as Internet Protocol (IP) and Domain Name System (DNS) emerged.

As Internet was made public in the 1990s, the companies quickly saw marketing opportunities on the Internet, although it had not been widely recognized outside the United States. According to Charlesworth (2009, p.3), the first web browser was published in 1993, which paved the path for the general public to find the Internet. However, at the time the computers and the Internet were quite expensive to the general public.

Northern Europe was one of the first ones with the United States to embrace the Internet and its possibilities. After the “Millenium” in 2000 the Internet grew more popular and started to attract every business and brand for marketing purposes, thus multiple websites for the companies emerged. The dot-com era began to bloom, offering a one-way marketing channel for the companies to display their products and services. At that time “commenting” on the websites was rare, thus withholding the discussions between the customers.

2.2. Development of blogs

The word “blog” is a shortened version of the word “weblog” which essentially means a personal website or a diary on the Internet, where the posts written are organized chronologically. According to Holtz & Demopoulos (2006, p.1), blogs consist of small posts or articles which contain text, video and pictures and they can be tagged and categorized (Reed 2012, p. 233).

The original purpose of a blog was to be updated frequently, resembling a real diary or a journal (Lotich 2010). The problem was that the average user of the World Wide Web did not possess the required technical skills to produce and publish personal content online. Technical coding companies acknowledged

the need and developed easy-to-use blogging platforms such as Blogger (now owned by Google Inc.) and WordPress.

These platforms transformed every average Web user into a possible publisher without any financial investment (Holtz & Demopoulos 2006). Bloggers were creating discussions amongst the public: the potential customers of the companies and business. The executives were forced to realize they needed to react since these discussions in the “Blogosphere” would affect their business.

2.3. Blogging today

Blogs have multiplied at a rapid pace, because in 1999 there were approximately 50 million blogs and because, according to Technorati (Technorati 2011), there are now over 164 million blogs across the Internet, forming a network of blogs also known as the “Blogosphere”. As Technorati states the conducted research’s aim was to discover the structure of the “Blogosphere”. According to the Technorati’s study, the “Blogosphere” consisted of a little over 60% of male bloggers, and a little over 30% of female bloggers in all of the genres of blogs. The majority of bloggers are between the ages 25 to 44 years. Blogs vary according to their category and interest. However, nearly everything can be the subject of a blog.

2.3.1. “BLOGOSPHERE”

Blogs are part of a global network as illustrated by the existence of the “Blogosphere”. What blogs have created inside the “Blogosphere” is most of all discussion. An average person with sharp observations about business and their surroundings combined with a large following (readers of the blog) can have a remarkable impact on business and the companies working in the field of that business. The bloggers are the potential customers and users of the discussed business; therefore executives have been forced to acknowledge the discussions taking place in the “Blogosphere” and participate in it (Holtz & Demopoulos 2006). This has caused the companies to hire staff to blog about

their businesses (Baker & Green 2008) and products to contribute to the “Blogosphere” and give the potential customers the opportunity to communicate through the blog. As indicated by Holtz and Demopoulos (2006), the public enjoys receiving advice and suggestions from others alike, therefore a recommendation from a blogger is more effective than a review on printed or other mass media.

2.3.2. WORDPRESS

WordPress states that it is the most-widely used platform for blogging. WordPress offers two kinds of blogging platforms: WordPress.com and WordPress.org. The latter is a free open source program which is installed into the user’s computer and requires some knowledge of coding and technical skills in order to get started. Since the program is open source based, it offers various modification possibilities and it can also be used as a base of a regular website not necessarily even looking like a blog. For the average users of the Web WordPress offers a free blog hosting service on the WordPress.com, which enables the user to start a blog in a matter of minutes. According to the statistics, WordPress hosts over 57 million blogs in total (WordPress 2012). WordPress offers a unique domain name option for a fixed fee paid on a yearly basis.

2.3.3. BLOGGER

A small company called Pyra Labs originally created Blogger in 1999. Google (Google Inc.) bought the already functioning blogging platform in 2002 and started developing it further. Being part of the Google network Blogger offers the possibility of linking everything effectively: e.g. Google’s other services can all be fused together, Gmail, Google+ and AdSense are simple for even the least technical skilled user to link on the Blogger. Google’s Blogger platform is very widely used, but Google is unwilling to provide actual statistics of how many Blogger blogs they host (Blogger 2012).

Similar to both of the platforms of WordPress and Blogger is their effortless use by everyone and the possibility of creating and publishing professional-looking content without being obliged to understand programming language.

At the present time starting a blog is easy and free (Lotich 2010). Blogger and WordPress are examples of blog hosting platforms; there are other hosting services on the Internet.

2.3.4. INSTAGRAM & TWITTER

The revolution of smartphones has generated the possibility to blog everywhere. This freedom has transformed the non-bloggers to actual bloggers with easy to install and use micro- and photo-blogging services such as Twitter and Instagram. Both Twitter and Instagram offer the user to post a limited (140 characters or one picture) minimalistic post at a time (Reed 2012, p.237).

According to CNet.com (CNet.com 2012), Instagram has gained over 80 million users since their launch in October 2010, as they offer a free mobile application for both the iOS and Android platforms. Instagram works as an easy photo-blogging service, where the users take photos with their smartphones, Instagram adds a filter with the application to make the photo more professional and uploads it to the service (Instagram 2012).

Both Twitter and Instagram have provided their users the possibility of hashtags. Concisely a hashtag means that the user can create a category or use an existing category by adding the symbol # before a categorized word. The hashtags make the organizing and searching for desired photos or discussions easier for the users. Businesses are able to use this same method to provoke and monitor discussions about their products, services and brands. This action also helps new potential followers to find to the actual blog or website of the company or the user (Reed 2012, p. 236).

3 FUTURE OF BLOGGING

As microblogging is gaining popularity, the possibilities of job opportunities arising from blogging are increasing. According to a survey conducted by Technorati (Technorati 2011, See Figure 1), 8% of the “Blogosphere” are corporate bloggers, whose part-time or full-time job is updating corporate blogs. The topics that corporate bloggers address in their blogs are the businesses they work in, the companies and the products or services they offer and technological breakthroughs. The Technorati survey revealed that 13% of the “Blogosphere” users were entrepreneurs or individuals blogging about their own businesses. The entrepreneur bloggers’ reasons to blog were sharing their knowledge and information regarding their business, acquiring new customers and clients and possibly professional acknowledgement. Both of these groups measured their blog’s success by the visits and hits that the blogs received (Technorati 2011).

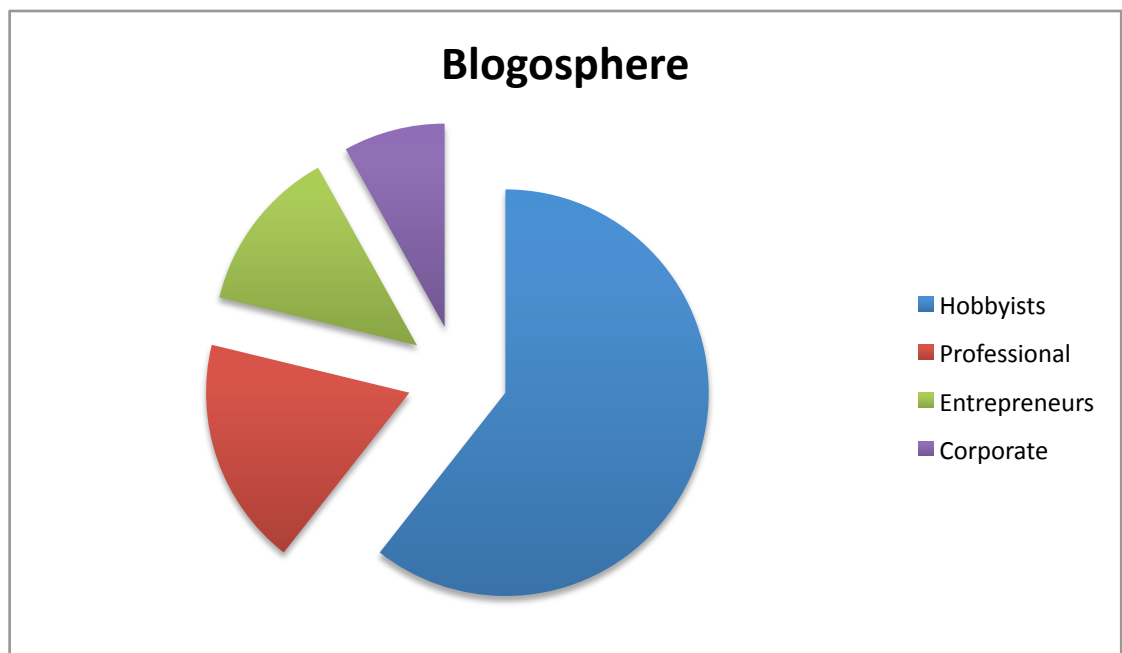


Figure 1. Technorati November 2011 survey structure of the “Blogosphere”

Figure 1 above represents the structure of the “Blogosphere” as stated by Technorati (2011). The Majority of bloggers in the “Blogosphere” are hobbyists, who consider the blog as their hobby and not a source of income.

However, the second largest part, nearly a fifth of the “Blogosphere”, are the professional bloggers who report that receiving revenues from the blog is at least a part of their monthly income. The third group consists of individuals and entrepreneurs who blog as a part of promoting their own businesses. The smallest group contains the corporate bloggers who blog as a part of their corporate full-time job.

Recently the companies have observed the opportunities of blogging and more companies strive to approach the customers where they are – on the blogs. Twitter already possesses a corporate strategy for companies, and Instagram is increasing the number of companies signing up and downloading the service.

3.1. Follower services

The number of followers represents the value of the blog. The number of followers represents trust, entertainment and interest factors. More followers bring better co-operation proposals from companies, increase credibility and cause the desired messages to spread wider across the Internet. According to Baker and Green (2008), auctioning a Twitter account on Ebay, one of the worlds’ well-known customer-to-customer auctioning services, can increase the following of the account.

Unfortunately, the value of the blog can be forged, as new businesses of buying followers have emerged to the markets. According to the BBC (2012), Facebook has more than 83 million false accounts. Fast Company’s research (2012) states that multiple online services offer 5000 Twitter followers for \$77 and 4000 Facebook fans for \$617. The new and increasingly popular Instagram is facing this phenomenon as well.

Bloggers around the world have demonstrated an easy and cheap way of buying followers to different accounts. The articles posted reveal that with financial aid it is possible to gain over 26 000 followers on Twitter within a weekend. Alternatively, an online company called StatusPeople has developed a program which can detect how many of person’s Twitter followers

are false inactive robots. In addition, with this program it is possible to check anyone else's Twitter accounts and publicly reveal any falsely acquired follower bases of friends and celebrities. Nonetheless, the follower services' gaining popularity amongst the public has decreased the trust of the companies in starting new cooperation with new bloggers.

3.2. Business around blogging

As blogging has become widely acknowledged by the public and businesses, new businesses have emerged from blogging as well. These new companies are using a limited selection of bloggers to promote their services to their readers who are the potential customers. One example of this type of company is TradeTracker which offers new potential companionship marketing options to websites and blogs. The company functions in multiple countries including Finland.

The regular approach of these companies is to host an event for the bloggers in order to give them lectures about the products and services they are offering. At the event food and other commodities are served to the bloggers free of charge, so as to attract them to participate in the event. The main goal of the company is to give the limited number of bloggers the right to use their services which they will promote in their blogs. As mentioned earlier, the company's target groups are the followers of the blogs who either have an existing blog or are planning to start one. For the promotional bloggers the service is free, but the new potential customers among the followers who acquire the service have to pay for it. The companies are using the blogs as marketing channels for cost-efficiency.

Multiple companies have started to listen to the bloggers needs, thus developing and providing new programs and methods for the bloggers to improve. One example of the mentioned companies is Publishzer (2012). New blogging programs are developed constantly to make blogs even more professional looking. For example a blogger who has medium following but has never improved the layout for the reason that it requires technical skills the blogger does not possess. A program that would do the coding for the

blogger while designing the new layout would be very beneficial, thus gaining the interest from others alike. The company can provide the trial version of the program to few selected bloggers to be reviewed on their blogs, thus reaching the desired target group. As the majority of the bloggers are hobbyists (See Figure 1), the possibility of the hobbyists becoming professional bloggers increases after using the coding program. Some of the hobbyists might have non-existent technical skills or the ability improve their blogs layout, thus stopping them from not pursuing a professional career as a blogger.

For example Publishzer (2012) is an invitation-only program for bloggers, designers and photographers to create magazine-looking blog posts.

Publishzer (2012) offers a trial version after the user has submitted their email and have been accepted into the program.

4 BLOG AS A MARKETING CHANNEL

The first period in marketing in general was ruled by mass marketing, which was the beginning of marketing known today. According to Reed (2012), it meant as wide marketing range as possible to the largest possible crowd, thus making Television the primary channel to be used. As mass marketing proved to be a bit ineffective and costly, the companies focused on more direct marketing sources, thus using segmenting and targeting the desired customers for the different products (Reed 2012). Today's marketing is called social marketing which means to find the already existing target groups and marketing directly to them. However, to avoid disturbing them with emails and letting the customers approach the companies. Using social media to marketing purposes fits the best for smaller companies and entrepreneurs as marketing can be expensive on mass media (Reed 2012). However, as the importance of social marketing is increasing, it does not rule out the forms of traditional marketing. Yet social marketing cannot be left out from a successful marketing strategy.

The customers of every business spend an increasing amount of time in social media, where they uncover their needs and interests. As Reed (2012, p.9) states this is valuable information to businesses especially: the effort to attract new customers turns into finding the existing ones. Using blogs as marketing channels is an easy way of finding the already existing potential customers for smaller online companies. According to Brown (2007, p. 20), blog marketing is the next rational action to be taken towards a complete and professional marketing strategy. However, Reed (2012) thinks that as starting a blog is easy, low-cost and modern, the target group and markets should be researched first before deciding if blog marketing is the right approach considering the desired target group.

Since starting and maintaining a blog is a relatively inexpensive way of promoting a business, it is fashionable and up-to-date as well. Brown (2007, p. 22) states that blogging is a powerful tool of reaching out and increasing the communication with the customers. However, Reed (2012, p. 9) considers blog marketing only as one of the needed tools for a working viral marketing

strategy, and it should not be considered as yet another method but a commitment.

The Internet has a vast number of guides how to set up a blog and how to make it profitable. Small online companies, which refuse to create a blog of their own, can profit from other blogs whose followers are the company's target group. According to Brown (2007, p. 15), marketing through a blog provides a face and actual spokesperson to the followers and potential customers, therefore creating a trust aspect when the followers are communicating with the person rather than an anonymous voice from the company's customer service. The follower is more likely to become a purchaser after reading a review of the product on a blog than from seeing an advertisement online.

As hundreds of thousands of blogs are created everyday and the nature of each blog is different, it is important for the companies to choose the blogs that best serve their needs for advertising. Many companies have set limits for the blogs they choose to advertise in, e.g. follower limitations. As an example, typically a blog should have over 250 followers through Google friend connect, or near 10 000 hits per month. These limitations vary according to the company, however observing successful blogs can be noticed that large follower-base blogs have high quality brand partners (See Figure 2).

4.1. Revenue Models

Revenue model means to illustrate how e.g. a business will make profit, receive income and create higher return of investment. According to Popp (2004, p. 49), the revenue models online can be categorized as hybrid revenue models when revenue streams are collected from multiple different sources. The person whose blog is used as a marketing channel can use other revenue streams as well to increase the benefit of the blog (Müller, Goswami & Krcmar, 2010).

Using social media to marketing is still considered somewhat a new channel; therefore multiple possibilities of marketing are yet to be developed. The

revenue models presented below are the ones which were exploited during the case study, also which best corresponded the nature of the studied blog.

4.1.1. SPONSOR BASED

In sponsor or paid revenue model the blogger receives a commodity from the company, which the blogger reviews on the blog. This marketing model is based on the trust the blogger is receiving from the followers of the blog – the potential new customers. After the review the blogger keeps the commodity as a payment from advertising, thus benefiting from the co-operation (Müller, Goswami & Krcmar, 2010). This revenue model is frequently used by small online stores to gain visibility and new customers.

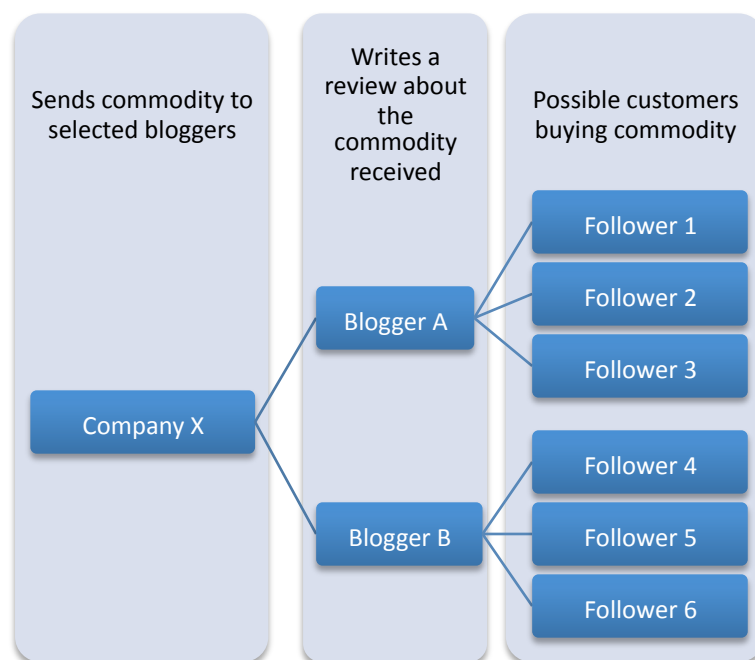


Figure 2. The flow of sponsor-based marketing on a blog

According to the observations whilst taking part in the sponsored based marketing, the usual flow of sponsor based marketing goes as stated in the Figure 2. Company X sends the commodities to the selected Bloggers A and B, as the majority of their followers are the desired target group of Company X. The Bloggers A & B, who enjoy the trust of their followers review and recommend the commodities sent by Company X. As a part of the desired the

target group the rate of the followers purchasing the product from Company X is higher than in regular viral marketing. Through this method Company X gets a higher success rate of acquiring new customers, as they market straight to the existing target group. By providing commodities to the bloggers with an active following is most likely to bring profit as only the amount of sent commodities have to be covered to avoid loss. This means that

The affiliated model is another form of sponsored revenue model, with the difference in the requirements of the company. The company sends the commodities to the blogger and after the review the blogger is entitled to keep the products. Generally in the affiliated revenue model the company requires a hyper link leading to their website to be posted, as well as the permission to the photos used on the review, hence acquiring content to their website. This revenue model is regularly used by small to medium sized online companies, with the reason to obtain new customers, quality content and more traffic on their website. The companies using this type of marketing strategy usually have higher limits for followers and website traffic, thus offering better commodities.

In both sponsor and affiliate based revenue models the company can give guidelines to the blogger what they want to include to the review. However, the blogger is ultimately in charge what kind of image to give from the company, thus leaving the company no choice but to trust the blogger for positive review.

4.1.2. ADVERTISING BASED

Advertising model is the most known and used model of profit from blogging. The bloggers sell an advertisement spaces on their blogs for multiple different companies, which can be unrelated to the content of the blog. The blogger gets paid per click (Reed 2012, p.237); therefore the profit is connected to the traffic and popularity of the blog (Müller, Goswami & Krcmar, 2010).

An additional advertorial revenue model is for the blogger to sign up to an online marketing service, which connects marketers and advertisers. In this model the advertisements come from the companies, which the marketing

service hosts and through services such as Google's AdSense the advertisements are shown on the person's blog according to the overall nature and genre of the blog, therefore reaching the target group of the companies. According to Müller, Goswami & Krcmar (2010) this type of revenue model is gaining popularity for its effectiveness in addition to the versatile settlements; the blogger can choose the method of which the commission is tracked.

4.1.3. GIVEAWAY BASED

The giveaway based revenue model is a successful way of adding value to both the co-operative company as well as the blogger. Using this model in most cases the only revenue to the blogger is the added value. The company offers a price for a giveaway hosted on the selected blog. Giveaway is a form of a raffle which requires certain tasks from the participants to complete to be qualified to enter and win the prize, such as following the person's blog and the company's Facebook and website. Another common task for the participants is to spread the word about the giveaway on their blogs or websites, thus increasing the number of participants, followers and value.

New programs such as Rafflecopter (Rafflecopter 2012) have been developed to assist the bloggers to host easy, reliable and truthful giveaways. The Rafflecopter hosts the giveaway on behalf of the blogger; the blogger's task is to define the requirements and timeframe for the giveaway. The Rafflecopter service is using Random.org to draw the winner, thus using the service publicly creates the image of honest and fair giveaway and blogger.

4.2. Networking

Communication has many variations according the circumstances, but generally requires at least two individuals to be efficient, thus stated by Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2012, 2009, 2006. p. 9) the communication is purposeful when corresponded with intention. Practicing good and professional communication with co-operating partners of the blog builds up a good reputation amongst the companies and future partners. Being a good

communicator is a way of marketing person's expertise and acknowledgement. However, as Reed (2012, p. 10) states behaving and writing in a professional manner should not mean losing individuality and personal opinions.

The subject of turning blogging into profitable to the writer has generated a vast variety of books. As mentioned above in the Technorati (2011) "Blogosphere" research, some of the bloggers are corporate bloggers whose job description consists of blogging about the company and business. However there have been cases on every blog genre where enthusiastic bloggers showing their expertise and interest through the content of the blogs have received job offers, thus stating the possibility of a blog representing an unofficial Curriculum Vitae (CV).

4.2.1. READERS AND FOLLOWERS

Followers and more irregularly visiting readers form the basis and value of the blog in collaboration with the content. A first time visitor of a blog considers all the three factors when deciding whether to follow the blog – the amount of followers, the regularity and the content of the posts. As the research in *Monetizing Blogs: Revenue Streams of Individual Blogs* (2010) the frequency of posts is directly connected to the amount of comments and traffic on the blog, therefore the most profit and value is gained by updating daily.

From the company's perspective the readers are the potential customers to be reach through the co-operation in the "Blogosphere". The defense rate of purchasing a product is lower when the suggestion comes from someone the person is considering trustworthy. Thus maintaining a certain professional blogger image is important, yet maintaining the familiarity and realness (Reed 2012, p. 10).

4.2.2. LINK SHARING

Networking inside the "Blogosphere" is equally important as communicating with the followers of the blog. Visiting and commenting on popular blogs is a way of marketing the person's own blog and professionalism. As Reed (2012,

p. 236) states only 9 percent of the followers are actively participating to the conversations on blogs while the majority is only browsing, thus remaining faceless to the blog keeper. Whilst commenting frequently to other popular blogs is time consuming, it creates traffic to the person's own blog, therefore possibly attracting new followers and adding value. The ideal situation is popular bloggers adding the blog to their blogroll, which is a list of the blog keeper's favorite blogs (Reed 2012, p. 234).

4.2.3. SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING (SEM)

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) aims to increase the Website's or blog's ranking on the search engines such as Google and Bing. According to Reed (2012) it is important to improve the visibility, as most users choose to click on one of the first options, rather than browsing through multiple pages of search engine results. As Kent (2012) states even the majority of the websites have not optimized their ranking on search engines, therefore this optimizing is important for personal blogs.

Search Engine Optimizing (SEO) is executed by adding important keywords on the blog's links; such as photos should be named to include keywords related to the content of the blog, therefore elevating the blog on search engine results page. The majority of searches found and the biggest search engine today is Google. According to Kent (2012) it provides nearly 70% of all searches, therefore being the most important to start optimizing from. Using Google's Blogger as a blogging platform is already raising the rank in search result page on Google.

According to Kent (2012) the search engines rank the pages according to the user's search terms used, thus ranking the results according to how close the words are in the actual page. According to search done with Google, using the words "Coco the Choco" brings the blog as the first result. However when using "Coco choco" the blog shows on the result page at sixth place, therefore the search engine marketing should be improved.

4.2.4. EXAMPLE OF XIAXUE

Xiaxue is a Singaporean-Chinese blogger, who has made her living by blogging. Her real name is Wendy Cheng Yan Yan and she has been blogging since 2003 and paid her bills from the income from blogging since 2005. Her revenue models consist of reviews as well as advertising space on the sidebar of her blog. She has created fixed prices for different revenue models, for example Youtube video of Xiaxue reviewing products costs the company 4000 Singaporean Dollars, which is approximately 2532 Euro (XE Currency converter, 2012). The return on investment (ROI) is difficult measure as an outsider, however Xiaxue has over 10 000 followers on her blog (www.xiaxue.blogspot.com), over 137 000 Twitter followers, over 116 800 Facebook fans and over 106 600 YouTube subscribers.

As commodities she has received various items from small contact lenses to holiday trips to Thailand. Xiaxue is a client in a Singaporean talent agency which manages her appearances and co-operations. The agency is acquiring her new companies to work with and events for her to be seen at. The reason for Xiaxue's success comes from being part of the first few people to start blogging. Next year is Xiaxue's blog's 10th anniversary. Xiaxue is a good example where blogging has become a profitable full-time job, when investing time in it and working hard.

5 THE CASE OF “COCO THE CHOCO”

The Coco the Choco blog was created as a personal hobby and a potential channel to share individual ideas and thoughts without a significant financial investment. The Coco the Choco blog was a journal about my interests: especially Japanese fashion and culture, hair and beauty products. The purpose of the blog was to be informational, enjoyable and easy for everyone to read and follow, as well as sharing some important aspects of my life. The blog was mostly targeted to people sharing the same interests, especially towards Asian and Japanese fashion and culture.

The blog was created using Blogger platform thus enabling various different features Google offered; such as Google friend connect which was a helpful tool to monitor the followers of the blog. Afterwards I synchronized Google Analytics to the blog to get more accurate statistics about the traffic. The individual layout was designed by me and visualized by a third party for free of charge while using CSS coding. The purpose of the blog was to find people with similar interests, share my taste of fashion and attract co-operation possibilities. The goal set in the beginning of the blog project was to attract over 100 followers per year and 3-4 partners from the cosmetics industry, by the average frequency of posts being 1 to 2 per week.

5.1. Japanese street fashion culture

Japanese street fashion blogs differ from the mainstream fashion blogs especially culture wise. Japanese street fashion culture has developed in a country, which was closed to western countries for centuries, and being a part of practicing Japanese street fashion style requires understanding and interest towards Japanese culture in general. Following such a blog does not require that knowledge, however a major part of the followers on my blog are interested in Japanese culture and fashion. Mainstream fashion blogs concentrate on fashion trends in the blogger's own country and world's fashion in general, in contrast of Japanese street fashion blogs which

concentrate on world's fashion mirrored through Japanese street fashion culture and magazines. Being a westerner and practicing a Japanese street style requires understanding the fashion in Japan, therefore purchasing Japanese brand clothing as well as false lashes and extreme false nails are important and different from the mainstream fashion bloggers.

5.2. Partners and Co-operation

The Coco the Choco blog was running for one and a half (1.5) years before it started to attract partners and co-operation due to the amount of followers (See Figure 3). The reason these companies contacted me suggesting co-operation was to reach their target group, which consisted of my followers. With a little amount of financial investment they reach the potential customers through my blog very cost-efficiently. The partner's intention with this co-operation was to gain new customers, create positive image for the company and in some cases more content to their online store.

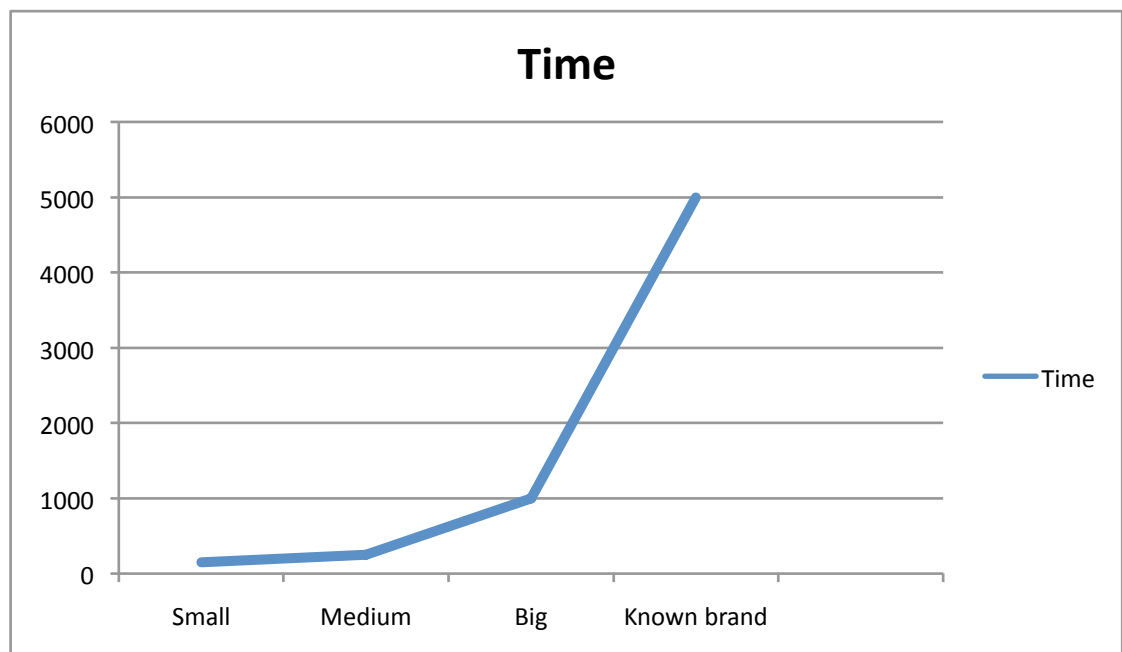


Figure 3. Followers adding value to blog and quality to partners

Figure 3 represents the value of the blog and the quality and size of the partners compared to the followers of the blog. The results discovered through observation during the 2 years of Coco the Choco blogging, shows that the amount of followers is directly connected to the popularity therefore enhancing the acquiring of bigger and better-known partners. This leads to getting new followers, which yet again elevates the quality of partners on the blog.

5.2.1. KKCENTERHK

The first company offering a co-operation possibility was a small online shop from Hong Kong with a selection of nail art supplies and other cosmetics. As a part of Japanese street fashion extreme nails are very common, therefore many small Asian online companies are offering various products with reasonable prices. Commodities I received from the company included nail stickers, nail art equipment, and glitter. Through email the company sent me ready-made adverts, which I could choose from to place on the sidebar of my blog. For the review I received only one request, which was to use the links on the post to the products on their website.

5.2.2. GEOCOLOUREDLENSES.COM

Geocolouredlenses.com was the first circle lens co-operation I formed. Circle lenses are a type of color contact lenses widely used in Asia to enlarge the iris of the eye. These cosmetic lenses are originated from South Korea, yet they are known and largely debated throughout the world (New York Times, 2010). The Malaysia based company was new and still small, yet they had high standards for the blogs they accepted to their affiliate program. They provided me a ready-made advert which was to be placed on the sidebar of my blog with a permalink, which is a form of permanent URL address leading to the website of the company (Reed 2012, p.237). Before the review on the blog I received informational email in which the company stated certain facts about their services, which they wanted to be included in the review post; such as authorization of their online shop and the lenses to a shipping cost explanation. After reviewing the commodities they asked for a permission to the original photos I had taken from the commodities, as they wanted to use

them on their website. As a reward from the positive review I got to choose another pair of lenses from their selection.

This co-operation continued to the Geocolouredlenses.com sending me multiple commodities at a time to be photographed, thus unofficially hiring me with very cost-efficient way for them to receive high quality pictures from their products.

5.2.3. LOVESHOPPINGHOLICS.COM

LoveShoppingholics.com (formerly know as Shoppingholics.com) is a Malaysia based, widely known, online circle lens store amongst the Japanese street fashion bloggers, especially from their large selection of multiple brand products. The company has used blogs as a marketing channel for a longer period of time than the companies mentioned above; therefore it has established a reputation amongst the community. As LoveShoppingholics.com contacted me, it felt as my blog had reached a certain level of credibility and professionalism, given that LoveShoppingholics.com has high standards of accepting blogs to their affiliate program. As the company is very popular amongst the Japanese street fashion bloggers, they get a lot of contacts for co-operation.

LoveShoppingholics.com provided me a ready-made advert to be placed on the sidebar of the blog, which was the only requirement they presented. The company sent me the commodity very quickly and after reviewing them on the blog they did not ask for the permission to the photos, thus I suggested that to them as a way of marketing myself and my expertise.

Afterwards the co-operation continued in a form of giveaway marketing. LoveShoppingholics.com offered the first prize for the giveaway, which I would host on the blog. The mandatory requirement for the participants for entering was to like LoveShoppingholics.com on Facebook, yet through Rafflecopter giveaway hosting service it was possible to increase the chances of winning with optional entries such as following my blog. The marketing was successful on increasing the amount of LoveShoppingholics.com Facebook fans as well as the followers on my blog. As Coco the Choco was not the only blog co-

operating with LoveShoppingholics.com at the time, the success rate of increasing the fans on their Facebook is difficult to measure. However, during the two-week giveaway period the followers through Google friend connect on my blog increased from 421 to 437 followers, thus growing the follower base with 16 new followers.

5.3. Communication with Partners

As the partners of the blog generally consist of small online companies the primary communication tool used was email. The first initiative can come from the company to the blogger, or the blogger can contact an interesting company suggesting co-operation. When the initiative comes from the blogger, the professionalism and marketing the blogger's expertise is important in forming a successful co-operation agreement. When forming a co-operation with the company, maintaining a good communication is vital to continuous collaboration. Maintaining the same co-operative companies gives a good impression to the followers as well as the companies since it increases the professionalism of the blog. For example a scenario where a blogger gets a commodity from a company only once often creates an image of unprofessionalism thus unable to maintain the co-operative company's interest.

During the case of Coco the Choco the partners required emails in multiple occasions, such as when receiving the commodity and after publishing the review. A good way to increase professionalism was to ask the company's opinion about the review as well as development ideas, thus creating a constructive conversation between the blogger and the company. During email exchange there occurred no problems between any of the co-operative partners, although the lack of professional English skills from one of the companies gave a slightly hasty impression.

5.4. Marketing

As Coco the Choco is used as a marketing channel by the co-operative partners, I marketed the blog in various channels to increase the traffic on the blog as well as to acquire new followers. The methods used to market the blog are to guide more traffic to the blog, thus using other social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram (Reed, 2012). YouTube is a channel that has not been used on the blog so far.

According to Vered (2007, p. 8) the intention of Word of Mouth (WOM) marketing is to create positive conversation about the subject, in this case study the blog Coco the Choco. The goal was to get several bloggers to visit my blog and ultimately linking it on their blogroll. This was achieved by frequently commenting on the popular blogs, which in return sent traffic on my blog. The focus was on commenting blogs that had several followers, as well as similar content.

Whereas posting on Instagram the usage of hashtags increased the amount of visitors on the pictures, therefore became important factor for acquiring new followers. Using hashtags increases the probability for the visitor to become new followers on the user's other blogs as well. Frequent commenting inside Instagram and using WOM proved to be beneficial for gaining popularity. Various widget services offer the possibility to add microblogging platforms such as Instagram to the sidebar of the actual blog. Widgets are mini-applications that can be connected to other platforms to provide the followers more content (Reed 2012, p. 241). The traffic will increase in both platforms; therefore using widgets is beneficial for acquiring new followers. On the sidebar of my blog is a widget to my Instagram account, thus showing a daily diary for those followers who are interested in frequent posts.

In the future more social media channels should be used on the blog, such as YouTube. YouTube is a video hosting service, which allows the user to watch free videos online without signing up or downloading any programs (Cloud, J. 2006). YouTube is now part of Google; therefore integrating it to Blogger is really easy. Using all the different social media channels such as YouTube, Blogger and Instagram, new things are offered to the readers on each channel

in the future. For example, on YouTube tutorial videos, shopping videos and guides are to be offered. On Instagram the followers are offered the possibility to be a part of daily life and see sneak peeks of future blog posts. On Blogger more professional pictures about my style and Japanese street fashion are published, as well as meetings with friends and events attended. By combining these channels so that users on each channel can find the other channels will increase the followers as every channel offers different articles. The use of Search Engine Optimizing is developed as well, thus making the blog appear higher on the search engine result pages such as Google and Bing. This will develop the blog even further and increase the credibility and online presence as well.

The future of the Coco the Choco blog is to grow into a profitable blog either as a part-time or full-time job. The purpose is to constantly improve the quality of the photos as well as the articles and engage new followers regularly. Acquiring new partners and co-operation possibilities have to be researched and contacted to increase the number of partners of the blog. The success is measured by creating new goals after reaching the previous goals.

6 RESULTS

Blogging has proved to be more beneficial to businesses than non-blogging for their ability to interact with the customers in a new and innovative way. The customers are more likely to purchase the products from the companies when a bond of trust is created through communication in the “Blogosphere”.

Businesses using blogs as a marketing tool are not considered faceless and unreachable. It is understandable for a successful blog keeper to be unable to answer every comment, yet choosing not to answer can leave followers feeling uncomfortable and unnoticed.

When starting a blog reasonable goals should be set to measure the success, furthermore the blog keeper should commit to the blog entirely, since as the researches show; the amount of followers and comments received is directly connected to the frequency and content of the posted articles. As starting a blog does not necessarily require any financial investment, creating a profitable blog requires investing time, which in some extent resembles money.

Other commodities are received as well, yet the companies providing them require an existing follower base before co-operation. When fully committing to the blog and showing expertise in writing and the field of business, the blog can bring job opportunities when constructed in professional way. Yet, the blog studied in this thesis is concentrating on a narrow area of specific underground fashion genre, the possibilities of it turning into job opportunities are extinct.

However, the majority of the goals set for the blog in the beginning of the thesis were reached. The success of the giveaway based marketing with LoveShoppingholics.com was difficult to measure since the Coco the Choco blog was not the only co-operating blog. Nonetheless, the number of fans on LoveShoppingholics.com Facebook page did increase instead of decreasing. Better online presence was achieved as well through communication with followers as well as other bloggers.

The communication with the partners of the blog was mostly fluid with the exception of the widely recommended and popular LoveShoppingholics.com, whose lack of proper grammar use in English was slightly disappointing, therefore decreasing the trust towards the company.

7 CONCLUSION

Blogs have come to stay, as in any new phenomenon the interest towards the blogs may vary and even decrease in the future, but the fact is, blogs are here. People are constantly developing new ways and improving already existing platforms, therefore the channels used in this thesis can turn invalid at some point in the future. New services and programs for blogging are created constantly to improve the quality and professionalism of blogging, thus adding value and credibility to blogs.

In the future, social media and blogging will become even more important part of marketing strategies, thus bringing the companies closer to the consumers. The future of the Coco the Choco blog is to become profitable and successful as well as staying as a channel for sharing the fashion style. The blog will be developed further by adding new social media channels such as YouTube, as well as studying the ways to improve the blog's ranking on the search engines such as Google, by using the Search Engine Optimizing (SEO). Preparing and publishing better photos and better posts will help acquiring new and better companies for co-operation with the blog. Constantly improving the blog and following the new trends in marketing and fashion will turn the Coco the Choco blog as a professional profitable blog.

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9 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Coco the Choco blog



Appendix 2 – Coco the Choco Affiliates

♥CO-OPERATION♥

Korean Circle Lenses Store

UP TO **60% off** SITE-WIDE !!

- ★ authorised reseller
- ★ trusted retailer
- ★ authentic products
- ★ free worldwide delivery

geocoloured**lenses.com**



Get 10% off from KKCenterhk!!
 Unique coupon code : **cocothechoco**
 End Date: 31st Jan.2013

e-CircleLens.com
 Genuine Korean Circle Lens



Söpöjä juttuja söpöille tytöille!!
www.essinmaailma.com

My Circle Lens From
www.shoppingholics.com

Free Cute Lens Case

All Ready Stock
Discount Code: 1000161850
 (USDS 2)

Appendix 3 – Coco the Choco on partner's website

geo coloured lenses.com
for alluring eyes

Advanced Search | Help

PREMIUM SERIES COLOR NINE - XTRA -15.0mm SUPER MAGIC MAGIC COLOR MAGIC CIRCLE ANIMATION COMBOS -- Save BY COLOUR
New! DIA -14.8mm DIA -14.2mm DIA 30%!!

US Dollar
Australian Dollar
British Pound
Canadian Dollar
Euro
Sing Dollar


ABOUT
DELIVERY & RETURNS
WHY GEO?
FAQ
ANTI-FAKE
BEAUTY TIPS
LENS CARE
REVIEWERS VIDEOS
TESTIMONIALS
REVIEWERS SCHEME
WHOLESALE/DROPSHIP
CONTACT US

Olemme Facebookissa
Geo Coloured Lenses
Tykkää
Sinä tykkäät tästä.
3,132 henkilöä tykkää kohteesta Geo Coloured Lenses
Facebookin yhteisö on avoin.

BE NOTIFIED OF...
SURPRISE FLASH SALE!

Home > BY COLOUR > Purple > GEO COLOR NINE AN-A41
Home > COLOR NINE - New! > GEO COLOR NINE AN-A41


GEO COLOR NINE AN-A41



RRP: ~~€24.42~~
Your Price: €16.44
(You save €10.23)
Shipping: Calculated at checkout
* Left Eye:
* Right Eye:
Quantity:

Suosittele
Ole kavereistasi ensimmäinen, joka suosittellee tätä.

Product Description



GEOCOLOUREDLENSES.COM
X cocothechoco.blogspot.com

Appendix 4 – Coco the Choco Giveaway revenue model with LoveShoppingholics.com



**Coco the Choco
Circle lens Giveaway!**

Coco the Choco
blogspot.fi

Sponsored by:

NOTE: This is a picture representing the price and not the actual price.
The winner will be able to pick the lenses of their choice and a
prescription from www.shoppingholics.com

Shoppingholics
www.shoppingholics.com

The banner features a pink and white plaid gift box tied with a pink ribbon, next to two jars of 'MONDOO' contact lenses. The background is a soft-focus floral pattern. The bottom section has a pink background with white hearts and yellow stars, featuring a woman in a pink and white checkered dress on the left and the 'Shoppingholics' logo and website on the right.

Appendix 5 – Coco the Choco example review on circle lenses sponsored by LoveShoppingholics.com (formerly known as Shoppingholics.com)



Enlargement: ♥♥♥♥♥ 5/5

For lenses that say 15.0mm diameter maybe I was expecting a little bit bigger effect. But these are very natural looking because of the enlargement effect is not made with a thick black outer ring. So I really like these lenses!

Piilareista, joiden läpimitaksi on kerrottu 15.0mm, odotin ehkä hieman isompaa efektiä. Mutta nämä ovat ihanan luonnollisen näköiset koska suurentavaa efektiä ei ole tehty paksulla mustalla ulkoreunalla. Tykkään tosi paljon näistä linseistä!

Comfort: ♥♥♥♥♥ 5/5

These are the most comfortable circle lenses I've ever worn! I love these! As you know, my eyedoctor said I have sensitive eyes, and these lenses are really comfortable even in my eyes. Because of the large (55%) water content they are super comfy, but also a bit tricky to get in the eyes.

Also, they can start moving around the eye because the lenses are so thin and don't feel much in the eyes. So mirror is good to keep at hand!

Nämä ovat ehdottomasti mukavimmat tällaiset piilarit mitä olen ikinä käyttänyt! Rakastan näitä! Kuten tiedättekin varmaan, silmälääkäriäni sanoi että minulla on herkät silmät, ja jopa minunkin silmissä nämä ovat mukavat. Suuren (55%) vesipitoisuuden vuoksi nämä ovat siis supermukavat, mutta se tekee niistä myös vähän hankalampia laittaa silmiin. Nämä myös voivat alkaa seilaamaan silmissä koska linssit ovat ohuet ja niitä ei tunne kunnolla. Joten kannattaa pitää peili mukana!

Color: ♥♥♥♥♥ 5/5

I really like the design and vivid color on these lenses. I like the shades of brown and how well they blend in my eyes. It also covers up my natural color nicely.

Tykkäsin todella paljon näiden piilareiden värikkydestä ja designista. Rakastan ruskean eri sävyjä joten tykkäsin näistä erityisesti. Nämä myös peittävät omien silmiäni värin hyvin, ja sulautuvat ihan hyvin siihen.

